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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage December 11 on the abrupt closing of the largest health club chain in Taiwan; on the protest against President Chen Shui-bian during a ceremony celebrating International Human Rights Day; on AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt's meetings with President Chen, KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, and DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh; and on President Chen's interview with the Associated Press Monday. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on page two that read "Bian Slams China for [Using] 'Nasty Means' to [Try to] Stop the UN Referendum." The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," on the other hand, ran a banner headline on page six that said "Burghardt Meets with Ma; the United States Is Worried That the One-Step Voting Format Will Prompt Passage of the UN Referendum." The pro-unification "United Daily News" also ran a banner headline on page six that read "Burghardt Meets with Bian; 'the United States Is Concerned about the Idea of Martial Law'."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a commentary in the "Liberty Times" criticized the United States for complicating the originally simple issue of Taiwan's UN referendum. The article said that Washington will harm its own interests if it over-maneuvers the UN referendum. A "China Times" news analysis said the purpose of Burghardt's trip to Taiwan this time was to secure commitments from both KMT and DPP presidential candidates that no matter whether the UN referendum passes, the status quo across the Taiwan Strait will remain unchanged. End summary.

A) "The United States' Excessive Manipulation Will Harm Its Own Interests"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Tsou Jiing-wen noted in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (12/11):

"The United States sent [AIT Chairman] Raymond Burghardt to Taiwan to communicate with Taiwan's president and its two major presidential candidates about the UN referendum. A situation that could have been relatively simple has been made more and more complicated by the Americans. What is the purpose of the United States to muddle up the originally unmuddled situation? Of course it is aimed at controlling Taiwan and manipulating U.S. interests between China and Taiwan. Such a means is obvious to everyone, but should it continue its excessive manipulation, the consequence will be just the opposite; it will be the U.S. interests that will be harmed. ...

"When one looks back at [what] the United States [has been doing], only words like rude and barbarian can be used to describe [its actions]. The UN referendum could have been dealt with separately in a moderate manner. It would be inappropriate to interfere with the referendum itself, but for [Taiwan's] UN bid, the United States, given its status in the UN, can say that it does not support it. Should Washington do so, Taiwan will have nothing to say. But the Americans have chosen not to do so; instead, it mixed the two things

together. Even though Washington said openly that Taiwan is not a colony of the United States, what it has been doing was actually akin to telling Taiwan, in the capacity of [Taiwan's colonial] metropole, not to hold a referendum. [The United States] has crossed the line and complicated the issue.

"President George W. Bush sent his special envoy, James Moriarty, to Taiwan at the end of 2003, asking A-bian to call off the referendum. The [U.S.] pressure was overwhelming then, but the sky did not fall and the earth remained rotating after [Taiwan] insisted on conducting such a referendum. [Washington] was playing the same old trick for the second time now; the model of [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] Thomas Christensen taking the initiative in

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talking to the Taiwan media will be repeated again in the future. Washington must carefully calculate the necessity of doing so and the sentiments of the Taiwan public toward the United States.

"This is because it is a serious breach of etiquette to point fingers at the Taiwan people and tell them what they must and must not do, and the consequence of such behavior will certainly be unexpected for the United States. Once the public gets infuriated, the United States may not only fail in its purpose of suppressing the voter turnout rate but will likely stir up the Taiwan people's will to vote, offering a final push to the referendum. In addition, since Washington's intent is so obvious, the Taiwan people might mistake the two presidential candidates for child emperors [installed by the United States] and thus sabotage their campaigns if the two echo [Washington's view] excessively. ... It is up to the United States to decide how to act and measure its gains and loss."

B) "The United States Acts with an Ulterior Motive; It Wants Commitment from Ma Ying-jeou and Frank Hsieh"

Journalist Chiang Hui-chen said in an analysis in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (12/11):

"... As for the United States, it has hardly any mutual trust with Bian, and the top priority for Washington is that it must secure a commitment from the two presidential candidates -- Ma Ying-jeou and Frank Hsieh -- regardless of whether the UN referendum is passed. Namely, [Washington wants to] make sure that no matter whether the referendum is passed, [the new president] will not act further to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, nor will [the referendum results] have any impact on the balance between Washington, Beijing and Taipei. The United States, of course, will not be happy to see passage of the 'UN referendum.' But if the referendum is really passed in the end, how to do damage control should be the key point for [AIT Chairman] Raymond Burghardt's trip this time.

"In particular, Washington is very worried that the next step Bian or the DPP will take is to launch a 'referendum on the writing of a new constitution.' This is the major issue that Burghardt has come to express serious concern about; it is also the so-called 'dispute on the bilateral political agenda' that the [Taiwan] authorities have implied! ...

"[AIT] Director Stephen Young has held press conferences twice and openly stated that 'the UN referendum is neither necessary nor helpful.' But his remarks have hardly caused any ripples in Taiwan. Will Burghardt's visit this time have any influence on Bian in any way? It is unlikely that Bian, who has a little over one hundred days left in the remainder [of his term], will care about the treatment he receives when he transits the United States in January 2008. Burghardt's ulterior motive is actually aimed at Ma and Hsieh; he made it very clear when he emphasized yesterday that '[Washington wants to] make sure that Taiwan's new president has an opportunity to deal with cross-Strait relations.'"

YOUNG